

2007.0.55.001 - Census of Population and Housing: Topic Directions, 2021

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Summary

Preface



PREFACE

INTRODUCTION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN STATISTICIAN

The Census of Population and Housing is a critical source of information collected every five years about Australians and the way we live.

The next Census will be held in 2021. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has commenced consultation and planning to ensure a successful Census.

Public consultation on the range of topics to be included in the 2021 Census occurred between 3 April and 30 June 2018. More than 400 submissions were received from a range of sectors including: all levels of government, academia, community and advocacy groups, industry bodies, businesses and individuals. This report summarises the outcomes of this consultation and outlines the next steps in determining the topics for the 2021 Census. Ultimately the topics for the Census are decided by the Australian Government, informed by the ABS's recommendations.

The ABS is required to run a five yearly Census by law. The information is used to shape our country's services and infrastructure needs; to locate health, education and transport services where they are needed. The Census allows us to understand the cultural, economic and social diversity of our communities, providing information about the population across small geographic areas.

The Census also provides long-time trends in key aspects of the lives of Australians. Many Census topics will be retained to continue this important trend data.

Decisions to change the questions asked in the Census are not made lightly. While changes

improve the data available to inform planning for a modern and changing population, they may reduce the value of data trends that have been collected for decades. The Census has always had to move with the times. In 1947, the Census form included questions on running water and flushing toilets. In the 1960s, Australians were asked if their house had a television set.

There is a limit to the number and type of questions that can be reasonably asked through a Census due to the burden on respondents in answering questions and the cost of collecting and analysing the information collected. Within these constraints there is opportunity for some changes in the questions to be asked in the 2021 Census.

Over the next two years the ABS will continue to explore areas of innovation and change to ensure a simple, secure and easy Census experience. We are drawing on the lessons from the 2016 Census and recommendations from a range of reviews to continually improve our delivery of the Census.

I thank those who have invested time and effort to make submissions on the topics for the 2021 Census. With this input we can be confident that our recommendations to Government have been informed by a wide range of views obtained through an open consultative process.

David W. Kalisch - Australian Statistician

14 November 2018

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Australia's Census of Population and Housing is one of the most important statistical collections undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The data collected every five years through the Census provides an important source of information that underpins decisions impacting every aspect of the lives of Australians. Information is used for a range of purposes, including planning, administration, policy development and evaluation for governments and other users.

In late 2017, the ABS began consulting with key users of Census data to determine whether there should be changes or additions to the topics to be included in the 2021 Census. Between April and June 2018, a formal consultation process invited all interested parties to contribute their views on the topics that are important to be collected in the next Census. Submissions have been received from across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors and from members of the public.

This paper presents a summary of the views collected and the key themes that emerged. It also provides a brief overview of the:

- process to review and assess the suggestions received
- current thinking for each of the topics
- next steps to determine the final topics for the 2021 Census.

The final decision on topics for the 2021 Census will be made by the Australian Government. This report does not include final decisions about Census topics, or the final recommendations that will be put to the Government for a decision. Recommendations will be refined through further engagement with key stakeholders and experts, reviews of operational feasibility and testing of questions in a Census context.

Recommendations will be presented to Government in mid-2019 for decision on the 2021 Census topics. The final list of topics to be included in the Census will be published by the ABS in an information paper (cat. no. 2008.0) expected to be released in late 2020.

Background

BACKGROUND

The first Census was undertaken in 1911. Before every Census the ABS has reviewed procedures and topics to ensure that the Census delivers high quality, timely and relevant information that Australia needs.

Reviewing topics is a fundamental part of planning for each Census. Some topics have been included in every Census, creating a valuable time series of critical information. However, the number and range of topics has changed over time to reflect contemporary views and emerging needs, with topics being included or excluded depending on relevance and importance at the time. With the increasing availability of administrative data, the possibility of using information from alternative sources is also considered in determining Census topics.

For both the 2011 Census and 2016 Census there was no change in the list of topics. In effect, topics have not changed since the 2006 Census.

In preparation for the 2021 Census topic review, the ABS considered the recommendations from the 2016 consultation process. Discussions were held with various government agencies and non-government Census data users to identify emerging data needs. The data needs identified were used as the basis for the discussion on topics during the consultation. These emerging data needs were outlined in a publication released at the beginning of the consultation (cat. no. 2007.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Consultation on Topics, 2021).

Overview of public consultation

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The ABS ran a submission process seeking views on the topics to be included in the 2021 Census. This consultation ran from 3 April to 30 June 2018.

The submission process was supported by an information paper (cat. no. 2007.0), media release and online briefing (including a live question and answer session). The briefing was recorded and made available online for those unable to attend the original presentation.

The submission process was promoted through email alerts sent through various networks and weekly posts through various social media channels.

Submissions were made directly into the ABS Consultation Hub or sent to the ABS via mail or email.

Participants were invited to make suggestions to keep, change, add or remove Census topics. Those who were making submissions were asked to include a summary of their suggested changes and to provide support for each suggested change against the following assessment criteria:

- the topic is of current national importance
- there is a need for data from a Census of the whole population
- the topic can be accurately collected in a form which the household completes themselves
- the topic would be acceptable to Census respondents
- the topic can be collected efficiently
- there is likely to be a continuing need for data on the topic in the following Census
- there are no other suitable alternative data sources or solutions that could meet the data need.

OVERVIEW OF SUBMISSIONS

In total, 450 submissions were received, with 315 published with consent on the ABS Consultation Hub.

Around 90 submissions suggested changes to standards, classifications or Census procedures and have been referred to the relevant sections of the ABS for further consideration. A small number of submissions also suggested changes already adopted in Census design.

The remaining 355 submissions addressed changes to Census topics.

Who made submissions?

Submissions were received from a range of private, public and community sector organisations including government departments across all levels of government, businesses, community groups, industry bodies/associations, and educational institutions (including academics and researchers). Fifty-eight submissions were received from individuals. A summary of the source of submissions is provided at Table 1.

TABLE ONE: NUMBER OF SUBMISSIONS ON THE 2021 CENSUS TOPICS BY SUBMITTER TYPE

Submitter Type ¹	No. of submissions	% of total
Local government	104	29.3
Individual	58	16.3
State/territory government department	58	16.3
Commonwealth government department	38	10.7
Community group	27	7.6
Educational institution	19	5.4

Industry body/association	19	5.4
Business	11	3.1
Other	21	5.9
Total	355	100

¹As reported by submitter.

What did the submissions say about Census topics?

Submissions suggested changes or additions to 37 of the 47 topics that were included in the 2016 Census and nominated 36 new topics to be included in the 2021 Census.

All topics, proposed and existing, have been aligned within 13 Census themes. The number of submissions received on Census topics grouped within these themes is provided at Table 2.

TABLE TWO: NUMBER OF SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED FOR CENSUS THEMES

Topic themes¹	No. of submissions	% of total
Transport	95	18.7
Income and work	48	9.4
Cultural diversity	43	8.5
Housing	43	8.5
Health	41	8.1
Disability and carers	39	7.7
Population	38	7.5
Unpaid work and care	27	5.3
Households and families	25	4.9
Location	24	4.7
Education and training	23	4.5
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	12	2.4
Other topics ²	50	9.8
Total	508³	100

¹Themes include new topic suggestions if they relate to other topics already on the Census.

²Other topics include Australian Defence Force service, sexual orientation and several topics with one submission.

³This number is higher than the number of submissions received. This figure reflects that some submissions addressed more than one Census topic and have been recorded against each separate topic.

First assessment of the submissions

Each submission has been reviewed against the assessment criteria. The suggested changes for Census topics have also been reviewed to determine if needs could be met from existing data sources. Together, these assessments have resulted in a preliminary priority list of Census topics for further investigation.

Eight of the proposed new topics have been determined to warrant further consideration as outlined in Next Steps. These topics, listed below, are discussed in detail later in this report (see Topic Directions):

- Non-binary sex and/or gender identity
- More contemporary descriptions of household and family relationships (including those with shared care of children)

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity
- Journey to education (including mode of transport, and name and address of educational institution)
- Chronic health conditions
- Smoking status
- Australian Defence Force service
- Sexual orientation

Five of the proposed new topics (listed below) are discussed in more detail later in this report although preliminary assessments have determined that they will not be further considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census.

- Sources of income
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participation
- Second residence and/or ownership of other dwelling
- Other languages spoken
- Other health related topics

Some new topic suggestions did not provide strong cases when assessed against the criteria. For some topics, the data can also be obtained from existing surveys or administrative sources. These topics, listed below, are not discussed in more detail and will not be considered further for inclusion in the 2021 Census.

- Access to, and experiences with, health services
- Allergies
- Child protection and youth justice
- Child support
- Dental health
- Experience of racism
- Food security
- Future aged care intentions
- Health and well-being indicators (including weight and body mass index)
- Household assets
- Internal migration over a lifetime
- Nutrition
- Personal safety (including experiences of domestic violence)
- Pets or companion animals
- Physical activity
- Place of birth in Australia
- Short term accommodation
- Subjective well-being
- Superannuation status
- Swimming ability
- Vacant land
- Veganism
- Wood heating

Suggestions for changes to existing topics that will be further assessed for the 2021 Census are described in the Topic directions section.

Two topics are proposed to be removed. They are 'Household internet access' and 'Number of motor vehicles garaged'. These topics are discussed under the themes of Housing and

Transport respectively.

Next steps

NEXT STEPS

The public consultation has closed.

The ABS will make recommendations to Government on the topics to be included in the 2021 Census in mid-2019. The final Census topics are a decision for the Australian Government.

To inform the recommendations to Government, the ABS will continue to explore the suggestions made through this consultation process. The sections below describe the steps in further detail.

DISCUSSIONS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND DATA USERS TO REFINE THE DATA NEEDS

Discussions with stakeholders are underway and are targeted to explore the data needs and seek any clarifying information required on proposed topics. Further support is welcome from data users on any of the directions expressed in the following sections.

AN ASSESSMENT OF COSTS AND OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Assessment of the cost and feasibility of topics will consider all aspects of the Census cycle including design, build, collection, processing and dissemination.

The number, complexity and sensitivity of questions asked in a Census can impact the quality of responses and consequently, the quality of the data collected. So not all suggested topics, including those assessed as providing valuable information, may necessarily be included in the 2021 Census.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF THE QUESTIONS

Questions will be tested through focus groups, individual interviews using cognitive testing techniques, and large scale tests. Question testing will ensure, as far as reasonably possible, that quality data can be obtained for the proposed new and amended topics. Large scale quantitative testing will be undertaken to refine the wording of questions and to ensure that new and amended questions do not impact on the overall quality of response to the Census.

GOVERNMENT DECISION

When the Government has decided the 2021 Census topics, an amendment to the *Census and Statistics Regulation 2016* will be tabled in both houses of Parliament in late 2019 to give effect to that decision, if required.

The ABS will publish an information paper outlining the 2021 Census topics (cat. no. 2008.0) after the final decision is made.

Topic directions

TOPIC DIRECTIONS

Topics have been organised into the following broad themes:

- Population
- Households and families
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Income and work
- Unpaid work and care
- Education and training
- Disability and carers
- Housing
- Location
- Transport
- Cultural diversity
- Health
- Other topics.

Each theme includes further discussion on topics, both current and proposed, which generated significant interest from stakeholders. Information is provided on the case for change and plans for additional work with stakeholders, research and testing to assist in prioritising final recommendations for topics for the 2021 Census.

Two proposed topics, ‘Australian Defence Force service’ and ‘Sexual orientation’, are discussed under the Other topics theme.

Topic suggestions which did not present a strong case for inclusion when assessed against the criteria are listed in the Overview of public consultation section. There will be no further work on these topics.

Population

POPULATION

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Population](#), [Sex and gender](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Name	Retain existing topic without change.
Sex and/or gender identity	Retain existing topic, with change to be tested. Further testing and discussion will be undertaken to explore when male or female are too limiting in response to questions on sex or gender.

Key questions on population have been asked in the Census since 1911. They provide information for the ABS to estimate the size, age and sex profile of the population across Australia as required under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*. This information remains relevant for decisions made by governments, businesses and local community groups.

Alongside this information, the ABS requests names to help people answer the right question for each person in the household, and to help us process the form correctly. The collection of names and addresses in the Census is a critical part of ensuring the quality and value of the Census. Name will continue to be collected in the 2021 Census.

The ABS protects personal privacy by removing names and addresses from other personal and household information after data collection and processing.

SEX AND/OR GENDER IDENTITY

The consultation process revealed strong interest from a range of sources regarding the collection of information on sex and gender identity through the Census. Submissions noted that the current practice of offering only male and female response options does not allow some people to provide accurate responses.

The complexities of collecting information on sex and gender identity were acknowledged; submissions identified the range of variations possible in sex characteristics and the diversity in gender identity. Sex has been considered a critical topic for measuring and projecting the population, so proposed changes in collection will be assessed for potential impacts on data quality.

While submissions noted a need for data to better understand the characteristics of transgender individuals and people with intersex variations, there were concerns that collecting this data is complex, with the potential for questions to produce data that misrepresent the population. Care is needed in the design of potential questions.

Current ABS standards for information on sex and gender recommend collection of 'male', 'female' and 'other' categories. It was noted by stakeholders that this classification of sex assumes intersex people are not male or female, which is not the case. The diversity of gender identity is not easy to define, but is also not well represented by the current standard. Stakeholders have encouraged the ABS to be clear about what could be collected and what the data would and would not represent.

The ABS will continue to consult with stakeholders, advocacy groups and data users to determine a way forward. Testing will include exploring options for collecting data on sex, gender identity and a combination of both concepts.

Next steps will include focus groups, interviews and field testing to explore options and understand the statistical impact of any change.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN

In the background information to the consultation, the ABS noted that this topic is likely to be

moved back to collection on a ten yearly cycle, commencing in 2021 to align with international reporting. This topic will be considered for removal in the 2026 Census.

Suggestions were also received for collection of the number of children ever born for males, both to estimate the number of fathers in Australia and also to acknowledge that individuals who do not identify their gender as female may have given birth. While this data need was not considered as high priority, new instruction language will be tested to recognise that non-female identifying people may have given birth.

Households and families

HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Households and families](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Household and family relationships	Retain existing topics, with change to be tested. Current methods for analysing relationships in a household will be reviewed to identify ways to better represent diverse family structures and improve alignment with user requirements.
Registered marital status	Retain existing topic without change.
Persons temporarily absent on Census night	Retain existing topics, with minor change to be tested. The questions related to persons temporarily absent will be updated in line with other topic changes.
Shared care of children (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Will discuss with key stakeholders to confirm key concepts to be included. Questions will be developed and tested.

HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Submissions received from all levels of government as well as community and academic groups highlighted the need to review and contemporise the way the Census captures data about families. Improvements in reporting of multigenerational family households; blended families; kinship care; shared care arrangements for children; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and/or Intersex (LGBTI) household relationships were suggested.

Next steps include a review of the ways the ABS analyses and processes data on relationships to identify changes that would be required to reflect a more diverse range of household and family structures.

The ABS will review international approaches and test options for changes to questions, instructions or guidance that improve the relevance of family data.

PERSONS TEMPORARILY ABSENT ON CENSUS NIGHT

The current Census questions about people temporarily absent from the household include name, sex, date of birth or age, student status, relationship to others in the household and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.

This detail is important to determine the usual household composition. It supports accurate identification of the number of children or dependents, number of students, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households.

Few submissions addressed this topic. However, questions may need to be amended to reflect any changes in other topics that would be relevant, for example sex/gender and household and family relationships.

SHARED CARE OF CHILDREN

Some submissions identified a need for better information on children that live across multiple households as part of shared care arrangements. Submissions identified that there is no data captured which specifically identifies shared care arrangements or the amount of time spent in each household.

This information would inform understanding of economic consequences and potential disadvantage in shared care arrangements. While there is some survey data available, it does not provide sufficient geographic or socio-economic detail. Having specific information collected on the Census would inform policy development and the delivery of services to affected families.

The next steps will include testing options to capture details of shared care arrangements and will leverage off reviews of other topics, including household and family relationships and persons temporarily absent. These are complex topics with a lot of detail derived from a small number of questions. Changes will be considered within the context of additional burden on respondents and operational complexity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status	Retain existing topic without change.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Will discuss with key stakeholders to understand data needs and test with the community.

Prior to the submission process, the ABS sought advice from representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups on how to improve participation in the Census. In 2016, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people missed in the Census was considerably higher than for the rest of the population. Advice was received that participation may be improved if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people felt that the Census was more relevant to them, noting that this might be achieved by adding a question about cultural identity or amending existing questions to facilitate responses from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The concept of cultural identity was described as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group, or groups, a person identifies with or feels that they belong to. Examples of such groups were described as mob, clan, nation or language group. Early discussions have indicated that this may be a difficult topic to collect due to sensitivity, respondent understanding of the topic, and complexity if the respondent identifies with multiple groups. Further discussions with stakeholders including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will occur and the operational feasibility of collecting this information will be assessed.

Feedback also identified that revising response categories for existing Census topics to have more relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, could improve engagement and participation without adding questions to the Census. Suggestions included topics such as ancestry and main language other than English spoken at home.

The ABS will continue to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory groups and representatives during the testing phase, and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are involved throughout the process.

Income and work

INCOME AND WORK

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Income and work](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Income	Retain existing topics, with minor change to be tested.
Sources of income (NEW)	Limited case for new topic. Won't be further considered for collection in the Census; data integration options will be explored.
Labour force status	Retain existing topic without change.
Status in employment	Retain existing topic without change.
Hours worked	Retain existing topic without change.
Self-employed - Number of employees	Retain existing topic without change.
Occupation	Retain existing topic without change.
Main tasks in occupation	Retain existing topic without change.
Industry of employment	Retain existing topic without change.

INCOME

Submissions confirmed the value of this topic and the need to maintain the level of detail provided through the Census. The question currently includes response options as ranges with equivalent amounts of weekly and annual income. Suggestions for change included expanding the number of response options, increasing the upper level, and collecting income against each source.

While there is strong interest in maintaining the current question, further testing and research will be undertaken to investigate options for respondents to enter their actual income rather than select from a range.

There will be no further investigation into adding a new topic on sources of income to the 2021 Census, but this information might be available through data integration work (i.e.

securely combining information from more than one source) or existing comprehensive income surveys such as the Survey of Income and Housing. Internationally, a number of comparable countries are either exploring or now making use of integrated administrative data sources to address the needs around income and sources of income. The ABS is investigating the quality of additional income variables such as main source of income and previous financial year income with the possibility of adding these as experimental items to the 2016 Census.

WORK

The work topic encompasses a number of questions on the Census form and produces a range of data outputs, including industry of employment, occupation, hours worked and status in employment.

Knowing how many people in small areas work in different jobs and industries provides information on skill shortages and training needs. Consultation has confirmed that the work data from the Census is vital information and should continue to be collected.

Some submissions identified the need for a better understanding of people with secondary or multiple jobs, distinguishing between casual and permanent employment, and better indicators of underemployment or long-term unemployment. Many of these topics are too complex to measure accurately on the Census. These data needs are better met through other sources such as labour force surveys and the linked employee-employer database (LEED).

New approaches to coding industry and occupation data are being considered. These aim to improve the accuracy of information about a person's occupation and industry of work with minor impact on the comparability of this information over time. The ABS will provide advice about these impacts to support interpretation.

Submissions suggested a review of the occupation classification (ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (cat. no. 1220.0)). The ABS recognises that this is desirable, however, as co-owners, the ABS and Statistics New Zealand (Stats NZ) have decided not to undertake this review in the short term. ABS and Stats NZ will reconsider this position in coming years. This classification is used in several surveys beyond the Census, so any review would need to consider the impact on a range of surveys and statistics programs. The suggestions have been captured and will be taken into consideration when the classification is next reviewed.

Unpaid work and care

UNPAID WORK AND CARE

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Unpaid work and care](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Unpaid work - domestic activities	Retain existing topic without change.

Unpaid care, help or assistance of another person due to disability, long term illness or old age	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested (see Disability and carers theme).
Unpaid care of children	Retain existing topic without change.
Unpaid work - voluntary work for an organisation or group	Retain existing topic without change.

Submissions noted that the topics under this theme provide a rich picture of the contributions Australians make to society outside of the paid work environment. Continuing the inclusion of the unpaid work and unpaid care topics in the Census was well supported.

UNPAID CARE OF CHILDREN

Suggestions for improvements to the questions on unpaid care of children included asking about the number of hours spent caring for children and recognising the contribution of grandparents in providing unpaid child care.

UNPAID WORK - VOLUNTARY WORK

There were also suggestions to expand the detail captured to distinguish between formal and informal volunteering, hours spent, and type and frequency of volunteering. Capturing this level of detail is complex and will not be further explored for the Census. However, this information is available through the ABS General Social Survey.

UNPAID WORK - DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES

Some submissions noted that information on unpaid domestic activities was less important and could be removed from the Census.

The ABS recommends keeping all four topics on the Census due to the economic, social and cultural value of these items, and the collective picture they paint. No changes are proposed to unpaid care of children, unpaid work - voluntary activity, unpaid work - domestic activities.

Amendments to data collection regarding unpaid carers are proposed under the Disability and carers theme.

Education and training

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: Education and training

Topics	Proposed actions
Attendance at an educational institution	Retain existing topic, with minor change to response categories to be tested.
Highest year of schooling	Retain existing topic without change.

Highest non-school qualifications	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested (includes collection of the year the qualification was completed).
Journey to education (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic (see Transport theme).

Feedback from stakeholders confirms that education and training topics should continue on the Census. Measures of participation in education and training enhances understanding of different population groups and helps governments and businesses make decisions like planning the size and location of educational institutions.

ATTENDANCE AT AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Submissions indicated that there are concerns with respondents’ understanding of the ‘attendance at an educational institution’ question, particularly with those attending preschool or participating in vocational education and training. The wording of these response categories will be reviewed to ensure that the data collected meets the needs of users.

Testing will also explore improving identifying people who do not attend an institution in person, for example undertaking distance education or home schooling.

HIGHEST NON-SCHOOL QUALIFICATION

Submissions noted that the data from this topic is coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED), 2001 (cat. no. 1272.0). There were significant changes in classifying qualifications after 1998, resulting in a current question asking if the highest non-school qualification was obtained prior to 1998.

Submissions identified an opportunity to enhance this topic by asking the respondent to record the year the qualification was obtained. With this amendment, the ABS would be able to identify the age of qualifications.

The ABS will test the value and quality of data resulting from this change, noting that it may be more difficult for some respondents to recall the year of completing their qualifications when compared to ticking a box about completing the qualification prior to 1998.

Disability and carers

DISABILITY AND CARERS

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Disability and carers](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Need for assistance	Retain existing topic, with major change to be tested. Testing and review will focus on exploring more outputs on reasons for needing assistance, and the use of aids or equipment for assistance.

Unpaid care, help or assistance of another person due to disability, long term illness or old age

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participation (NEW)

Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested. Question testing will focus on asking this topic of all people, to allow identification of care being given by younger carers.

Limited case for new topic. Will not be further explored.

Census topics on the need for assistance or care provide data on the needs of some of the most vulnerable populations across Australia. The consultation feedback supported this topic, but recognised that there are enhancements to the existing questions and output that could better identify the needs of people with disability and their carers.

NEED FOR ASSISTANCE

The Census currently has four questions on the need for assistance which are used to derive a single measure of people living with a core need for assistance. Submissions supported expanding the outputs to show the activities for which assistance is needed (i.e. self-care, body movement and communication).

Submissions also focused on the need for data on people who need assistance with core activities from an aid and/or equipment, rather than a person.

Feedback from stakeholders has confirmed that the current measure of a core need for assistance is still important. Both new concepts will be taken forward for further testing, while recognising the importance of maintaining the time series for the current topic.

UNPAID CARE, HELP OR ASSISTANCE OF ANOTHER PERSON DUE TO DISABILITY, LONG TERM ILLNESS OR OLD AGE

Some submissions noted that children (carers less than 15 years old) often provide care, help or assistance to another person but are excluded from providing this data on the Census due to the age cut off applied in the Census.

The ABS will test changing the sequencing or flow of the questions to remove the age restriction from this question, including whether there is an impact on other data collected.

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME (NDIS) PARTICIPATION

Some submissions suggested adding a question about whether the person is receiving support through the NDIS to provide information on the sections of the population using and not using the scheme. Many felt it was important to understand the circumstances of participants who access NDIS to help with planning of services and delivery related to the scheme.

Based on the potential availability of this data from administrative sources that can be linked with Census data, the ABS assessed this was not a priority topic for collection in the 2021 Census.

Housing

HOUSING

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Housing](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Number of bedrooms	Retain existing topic without change.
Type of tenure (including ownership and rental)	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested regarding affordable housing and social housing.
Landlord type for rented dwellings	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested regarding affordable rentals and renting of community or social housing.
Housing costs	Retain existing topic without change.
Other private dwelling information (including structure, type, location and residential status)	Retain existing topic without change.
Other non-private dwelling information (including name, address, type, number of persons resident and their residential status)	Retain existing topic without change.
Measures of homelessness	Minor change to be tested to content to improve estimates of homelessness.
Internet access	Remove existing topic. Limited case for additional topics regarding internet use and access. Will not be further explored.

The consultation process confirmed that housing topics remain important to be collected in the Census. Submissions offered suggestions to amend questions to develop a better understanding of home ownership such as changes in tenure, length of time at current dwelling and future intentions for housing. Many of these topics were considered too complex to explore in detail in the Census. However, minor changes to topics on social housing, affordable housing support and measures of homelessness will be explored further.

TENURE AND LANDLORD TYPE

Submissions supported a need to measure the number and growth of housing purchased under affordable housing schemes or rented through affordable rental programs. There were also suggestions to improve the accuracy of information on the prevalence of different types of social housing (i.e. public and community housing). These suggestions will be reviewed regarding broader housing standards, and the existing questions on tenure and landlord type will be tested to determine what additional detail may be possible to collect through the Census.

MEASURES OF HOMELESSNESS

While homelessness itself is not a characteristic that is directly collected in the Census, estimates of the homeless population may be derived from the Census using analytical techniques based on both the characteristics observed in the Census and assumptions about the way people respond to Census questions. Key stakeholders provided feedback that they would like to see improvement in capture of 'couch surfing' (staying temporarily in other households without a usual residence), family homelessness, and transitions to and from homelessness. Stakeholders also noted requirements to better understand homelessness for vulnerable population groups like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and/or Intersex (LGBTI) individuals and veterans.

Each of these data needs will require consideration against a range of current topics

(including tenure/landlord type, usual address, address one and five years ago) and potential new topics (including gender identity, sexual orientation and Australian Defence Force service). Where these topics are being reviewed, they will be done in consultation with stakeholders and with consideration of these additional data needs.

INTERNET ACCESS

The current Census question asks whether any member of the household accesses the internet from the dwelling. Submissions suggested that with the growth in internet access on mobile and other devices and the fast pace of technological change, the collection of data on household internet access has less relevance.

A number of suggestions were made to replace this topic with another individual internet access and use-based question, including measures of digital inclusion and digital literacy. While these topics are considered important in understanding the impact on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the population, they are considered too complex to be collected in the Census.

It is unlikely that ABS will recommend to Government that this topic remain on the 2021 Census.

Location

LOCATION

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Location](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Address on Census night Usual residence at Census time	Retain existing topic without change. Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested to provide clearer guidance for temporary visitors without a usual address.
Internal migration 1 year (address one year ago)	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested as per usual residence.
Internal migration 5 years (address five years ago)	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested as per usual residence.
Second residence and/or ownership of other dwelling (NEW)	Limited case for new topic. Will not be further explored.
Address of workplace attended	Retain existing topic without change (see Transport theme).

USUAL RESIDENCE AND INTERNAL MIGRATION

Questions about usual residence and past residences are critical for population estimates and projections. To acknowledge circumstances where an individual may not have a usual address currently (or one and five years ago), instructions are provided asking them to write 'none' rather than an address. Responses to these questions are valuable for deriving estimates of 'couch surfing' (those people staying temporarily in other households without a usual residence).

Stakeholders interested in data on homelessness requested improvements in the identification of couch surfing by enabling respondents to select the option of 'no usual address'. As questions on addresses are critical for population data, changes will only be considered with a view of the potential impact on quality of population estimates. Options to improve estimates of couch surfing will be explored, including improved guidance on the Census form relating to these topics. Any options will be further discussed with stakeholders.

SECOND RESIDENCE AND/OR OWNERSHIP OF OTHER DWELLING

Some submissions indicated that information on second residence would be helpful in planning with particular relevance for:

- Coastal towns, towns at or near resource industry activity, and rural and remote areas where population numbers are small, and part time or seasonal residents may impact housing affordability and infrastructure needs.
- Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where short term mobility impacts on service provision and access.

This topic was extensively researched and tested in the lead up to the 2016 Census, and found to be difficult for respondents to understand. The topic also introduced cost and complexity in processing additional addresses. Initial assessment has determined that these challenges still exist and that it would be very difficult to collect data of sufficient quality. Therefore, this topic is not considered suitable for collection in the 2021 Census.

Related to the use of second residences, questions were also raised around understanding complex family structures including children in shared custody arrangements. This topic is addressed in more detail under the Households and families theme.

Transport

TRANSPORT

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Transport](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Mode of travel to work	Retain existing topic without change.
Name and address of workplace attended	Retain existing topic without change.
Mode of travel to educational institution (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Questions will be developed for testing and operational feasibility assessed.
Name and address of educational institution (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Questions will be developed for testing and operational feasibility assessed.
Number of motor vehicles garaged	Remove existing topic.

Information about where people work and how they get to work helps inform policy and planning of road infrastructure and public transport. Submissions supported the importance of transport topics, with these topics receiving strong interest through the process.

Ideas included expanding the reasons for travel beyond work, reporting the time to travel to work, and adding or enhancing the modes of travel, with specific interest in recording the use of motor cycles as a mode of travel. The Census topic currently collects the use of motorcycles and motor scooters as an option for travel to work. However, as the proportion of people selecting this category is relatively low, it is not always displayed in published Census output tables and graphics.

Some submissions identified the limitation of the 'walked only' transport category and suggested that people may walk in combination with other modes of transport and they should be able to report this. This has been previously tested but it is difficult to clearly distinguish between a significant walk and shorter walks (e.g. from a car park to public transport). The current question and 'walked only' category focuses on instances where walking is the primary method of travel and will be retained.

MODE OF TRAVEL TO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AND NAME AND ADDRESS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Some submissions suggested including journey to education (combining mode of travel and name and address of institution) to complement the data collected for journey to work. It was noted that travel for education makes up a significant portion of the reasons for travel during peak hours and combined with journey to work data would provide an improved understanding of traffic flows and transport patterns in towns and cities. Details of the educational institution attended for students would also provide information to improve the quality of data collected on the type of educational institution attended.

Early investigations raised concerns about the burden on respondents to recall another address (educational institution). Journey to education may also generate complex responses for tertiary students with irregular study schedules, and parents dropping off school students on multi destination journeys.

Processing data for journey to work is complex. Introducing new topics for journey to education may add significant cost, which needs to be understood and assessed.

Testing will seek to explore options for the collection of this topic, the potential for impact on the current journey to work topic, and the potential costs incurred to collect, process and present data on this topic.

NUMBER OF MOTOR VEHICLES GARAGED

Previous discussions over the past two Census cycles have noted the declining requirement for data on the number of motor vehicles garaged, given that administrative data sources may provide this information.

Some submissions supported retaining this topic and expanding it to include motor cycles. However, administrative data, including state and territory vehicle registrations by location, have been assessed as appropriate alternatives to collecting this data through the Census. It is unlikely that ABS will recommend to Government that this topic remain on the 2021 Census.

Cultural diversity

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Cultural diversity, Religion](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Australian citizenship	Retain existing topic without change.
Country of birth	Retain existing topic without change.
Year of arrival in Australia	Retain existing topic without change.
Country of birth of parents	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested (review for gender neutral language).
Main language other than English spoken at home	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested regarding the capture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (also see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples theme).
Other languages spoken (NEW)	Limited case for new topic. Will not be further explored.
Proficiency in spoken English	Retain existing topic without change.
Ancestry	Retain existing topic, with minor change to be tested regarding the capture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestry (also see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples theme).
Religious affiliation	Retain existing topic without change.

Submissions indicated that cultural diversity remains a relevant and important topic. Specifically, submissions supported most cultural diversity topics on the Census to remain without change but noted opportunities for minor changes on some topics to better understand new and emerging priorities.

COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF PARENTS

Some submissions requested removal of 'mother' or 'father' from the country of birth of parents question to be more inclusive of non-traditional family structures.

Feedback from key stakeholders indicated there is a data need for the collection of gender (mother and father). The ABS will test options to provide more guidance through instructions to accommodate non-traditional family structures, while still identifying the gender of parents in questions where required.

MAIN LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH SPOKEN AT HOME

Representatives of the deaf community have suggested the wording of this question needs to be updated to reflect that people who communicate in sign language *use* rather than *speak* that language. Testing of the impact of wording changes will occur.

As noted under the theme of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there will be further review and testing of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are captured and whether there are ways to encourage more detailed responses for this topic.

Some submissions suggested expanding the concept of the current 'main language other than English spoken at home' to capture other languages used and proficiency in all languages. A core use of the current topic is to identify needs for translation services, language assistance and English language programs for individuals without proficiency in

English. While other language proficiency would provide valuable information on the diversity in Australia, it has not been assessed as a priority over the current ‘main language other than English spoken at home’.

ANCESTRY

Some submissions suggested that taking a different approach to the collection of data on ethnicity would be a better indicator of cultural inclusion and participation than ancestry. There were also a number of suggestions indicating that the ABS should collect information on 'race'. The importance of the existing ancestry topic was emphasised by data users, and it is unlikely that any change to this concept will occur in the 2021 Census.

Submissions however noted a need to improve the question on ancestry for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The ABS will consult and investigate changes to this question to improve the relevance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

The current Census question collects information on religious affiliation rather than religious involvement.

Some submissions suggested that a question on religious involvement would give a better picture of how actively people participate in their religious activities. However, collecting information on religious affiliation is consistent with international Census practice and is better aligned with planning for services delivered by religious organisations such as education, health and aged care. The ABS will continue to collect information on religious affiliation in the Census.

Some submissions challenged the way in which the religious groups or denominations are presented in the question and commented on the structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, 2016 (cat. no. 1266.0).

The order of the response options will be reviewed in the lead up to the 2021 Census based on analysis of the 2016 data. Feedback on the standard and the associated classification will be considered as part of an upcoming review.

Health

HEALTH

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Other topics](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Chronic health conditions (NEW)	Strong case for new topic. Will discuss with key stakeholders to confirm concepts and health conditions to be included and test performance of questions through cognitive testing.
Smoking status (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Will discuss with key stakeholders to confirm concepts to be included. Questions will be tested.

Currently, there are no questions regarding health asked in the Census, but for some years health topics have been of interest to stakeholders.

CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

There was strong support through consultations and from submissions outlining a need for data on the health status of Australians, with particular interest in being able to analyse data on chronic health conditions against geographic and socio-economic variables.

Stakeholders supported the inclusion of a new chronic health conditions topic (this term was used interchangeably with 'long term health conditions'). Further engagement with stakeholders and testing will refine data needs and identify the health conditions that could be included in a Census question.

SMOKING STATUS

Some submissions presented a case for collecting data on the smoking status of individuals, noting that smoking continues to be one of the biggest risk factors contributing to ill health in Australia, and the proportion of smokers is significantly higher in some population cohorts.

Further testing will explore options to collect data on current and previous smoking behaviours. This will include testing questions similar to those used in the New Zealand Census and from the ABS' National Health Survey, which has a comprehensive module on smoking behaviours.

While there was interest in both health topics (chronic health conditions and smoking status), many submissions gave higher priority to including a chronic health conditions topic over a topic on smoking status. Stakeholders noted the greater value that a chronic health conditions topic would provide for service planning. This preference will be a factor in determining the recommendations for the final list of Census topics.

OTHER HEALTH RELATED TOPICS

Other submissions proposed that data be collected on a number of health related topics and indicators including: weight; body mass index; amount of physical activity; nutrition; allergies; access to and use of health services; veganism; and swimming ability. These suggestions were not supported by strong evidence in the submissions, and often relevant information is collected through a number of ABS health surveys. These suggestions will not be explored further for inclusion in the 2021 Census.

Other topics

OTHER TOPICS

Further information from the public consultation phase can be found here: [Other topics](#)

Topics	Proposed actions
Australian Defence Force service (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Will discuss with key stakeholders to confirm concepts to be included and questions to be tested.
Sexual orientation (NEW)	Moderate case for new topic. Further discussion and testing will be undertaken to explore the suitability of collecting this topic in the Census.

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE SERVICE

Some submissions indicated a need for data on people who have served, or are currently serving, in the Australian Defence Force, including Reserves.

While records exist for current service, they are not maintained for previous service, and limited historical data is available. A question on current or past Australian Defence Force service has been included in several ABS health surveys. Collecting the data in the Census would allow stakeholders to more accurately estimate numbers of people who have served and to learn more about the veteran population based on age, sex, geographic distribution, and employment status.

Submissions identified veterans as a vulnerable group with potential to experience homelessness and to have specific health and disability needs. This topic would provide information to enable better delivery of services and support for veterans.

The ABS will continue to explore this topic through testing, engagement with key stakeholders and reference to international best practice.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A range of submissions noted the lack of information available on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and/or Intersex (LGBTI) individuals in Australia. Please note that LGBTI is respectfully being used as an umbrella term to refer collectively to a wider range of people than just those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex. The use of this acronym is not intended to exclude people that may not be specifically represented by these or other terms.

It was noted in submissions that LGBTI individuals are diverse based on sexual orientation, gender identity and variations in sex characteristics. The review of options for collecting sex and/or gender identity (see the Population theme) has potential to provide some data on LGBTI individuals, depending on how collection is approached. To provide a more complete picture of the LGBTI communities in Australia, submissions suggested collecting data on sexual orientation as well.

By gathering statistics on sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status, government and non-government organisations would be able to plan, legislate and provide resources to support LGBTI people. Submissions noted that there is a need to effectively evaluate national programs such as the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and the Aged Care Diversity Framework, which include the LGBTI communities as vulnerable priority groups for action.

The ABS recognises the sensitivity of the topic and concerns regarding the quality of the data that would be obtained, including where individuals respond on behalf of others in their household.

The ABS will engage with stakeholders on this topic. Concepts will be discussed at focus groups and questions tested to understand the potential opportunities and risks in collecting this data. Information from testing, advice from stakeholders and guidance from other national statistical agencies will be considered to determine suitability for the 2021 Census.

About this Release

The purpose of this publication is to provide a summary of key themes emerging from the 2021 Census content public consultation process. The directions noted will continue to be explored, tested and developed to inform the ABS recommendation to the Australian Government in mid 2019.

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